

The AGORA *bulletin*

AGORA – the Newsletter of the Aberdeen University and College Union

2009 Pay Negotiations and Job Security

On 30 September 2009 a consultation meeting of all UCU branches in Scotland will be held in Edinburgh with a view to gauging the reaction of members to UCEA's (University and College's Employers Association) final pay offer of 0.5%. This offer constitutes the latest stage in a protracted sequence of events that have marred efforts to reach an agreeable pay settlement and protect jobs across the HE sector.

It is important that colleagues here in Aberdeen understand the wider context of the planned consultation meeting at the end of September and contribute their opinions on the question of pay and UCU's efforts to negotiate a national agreement on job security. Following an earlier round of talks in April, where the employers refused to act constructively to stave off redundancies while demanding that pay rises be 'traded off' against jobs, UCU felt compelled to initiate a ballot for possible strike action. There is little point in rehearsing the technical problems or legal challenges from UCEA which resulted in the temporary cancellation of the ballot on 18 May. A more substantive worry for UCU was that the membership felt unsure about the issues and apprehensive about the relatively short timescale between the ballot and any meaningful strike action.

These questions were fully and frankly addressed at UCU's national congress on 27-29 May. It was unanimously agreed that UCU should continue to work with the other higher education unions (EIS, GMB, UNISON and UNITE) for a pay claim that genuinely reflects the commitment and effort of staff in the university sector. Effective union co-operation is also vital in the ongoing attempt to persuade UCEA that it is in everyone's interests to negotiate a nationally agreed policy on job security. At a time when demand for student places has never been higher, it reflects poorly on the universities as individual employers and as a collective that UCEA will not discuss any effort to minimise intellectually and materially damaging jobs cuts. Now is the time for constructive and responsible leadership and a robust defence of the sector as a whole; UCEA have so far signally failed that test.

UCU, too, recognises the need to do more to inform members of the gravity of the national situation. It was agreed at Congress that the National Executive was not to take further action until it had initiated a thorough consultation of the membership. The meeting in Edinburgh will therefore be one of many, and is designed to inform UCU's national negotiations with UCEA. The University of Aberdeen UCU branch will send two delegates to this meeting to pass on the reaction of members to the latest pay offer and the ongoing failure of UCEA to engage in talks about a robust national policy for the avoidance of redundancies. In order that the delegates can have as accurate and as wide a picture as possible of the membership's opinion, the local committee has decided to hold a General Meeting on **TUESDAY 29th SEPTEMBER (1PM - 2 PM, OLD SENATE ROOM, KING'S COLLEGE)** and issue an e-survey.

Please do use the opportunity afforded by the General Meeting and the e-survey to pass on your thoughts, concerns and suggestions. These in turn will be relayed to national officials at the meeting in Edinburgh. As always, members can contact the local departmental representative and the local committee at any time at: aberdeen-ucu@abdn.ac.uk. Alternatively, and in confidence, members can email the branch's administrative officer, Susan Melvin at: susan.melvin@abdn.ac.uk

Best wishes
AUCU Committee

e-survey - your views are vital...

Have you completed the e-survey? Your views are vital not only in a local context, but also in the formulation of national strategy. AUCU officials will take your views to the national officials' gathering in Edinburgh on 30th September. Please take a minute to complete 4 simple questions, and take the opportunity to add any additional comments you may have.

The next full edition of AGORA will be published on 5th October 2009. If you wish to contribute an article or express your opinion please contact the editor via the Branch Administrative Officer, Susan Melvin, at: susan.melvin@abdn.ac.uk. **Your views are not just welcome they are essential.** Central to the October issue will be updates on the ongoing pay negotiations, tuition fees, and the recently published report of the CBI Higher Education Taskforce.

